19th June 2024

Gratitude

"Sweet music's melting fall, but sweeter yet
The still, small voice of gratitude."
Thomas Gray, *Ode for Music*

It's an old story, but it bears repeating …The parents were trying to ensure their children were polite: not being obstreperous in public; speaking only when spoken to; saying "please" and "thank you" at the right time. Aunt Martha always brought sweeties when she visited. One day, the five-year-old just grabbed his sweets from Aunt Martha and stuffed them in his mouth. "Come on, Ruben," his mother remonstrated. "That's rude. What's the magic word you have to say to Aunt Martha?" To which the recalcitrant child replied, "Abracadabra!" and promptly ran off with the sweeties.

A few weeks ago, I conducted the funeral of an old friend. After the church service, while the mourners adjourned to a local restaurant for the post-funeral "purvey", the family and I went first to the cemetery for the internment. It was a beautiful day. The gravediggers from the local Council carried the coffin to the open grave, helped lower it down, and, after the committal, sealed the grave temporarily with a board which held the floral tributes. When the Benediction had been said, and before the gravediggers left us, I said a "thank you" on behalf of the family to the Funeral Director, the limousine drivers and the "cemetery attendants", reminding folk of the work that had been done to prepare the plot, and the work that would be required, after we left, to fill in the grave.

As I was walking back to the cars, one of the gravediggers, a man of a pretty earthy type (if you will pardon the pun) took me aside and said, "You know, in all the years I've worked here, that's the only time I've been thanked for what I do. So, thank you, minister, for your 'thank you' today. It means a lot to me and the lads."

Gratitude! What's the magic word? You can ditch your fancy "abracadabras" when a simple "thank you" means so much. I suspect a good gravedigger – and his mates – would have a story to tell when they went home at the end of their working day. And, you never know, perhaps they felt encouraged to say "thank you" to some of the unheralded people who also do good things for them.

A prayer for today

Thank you, God. Now, let me think. What's next? Oh yes, thank you again. Amen

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